

PENNSYLVANIA

Saving Lives through the Pennsylvania Cancer Education Network

Problem

An estimated 28,815 people were expected to die from cancer in Pennsylvania in 2008. More than 60% of cancer deaths can be prevented by modifying risk factors and detecting cancer early. Colorectal, prostate, ovarian, and melanoma of the skin cancers account for about 30% of invasive cancers diagnosed in Pennsylvania.

Intervention

The Pennsylvania Department of Health provides free cancer education services in all 67 counties to communities, organizations, civic groups, and worksites through the Pennsylvania Cancer Education Network (PCEN). Sixteen grantees of the PCEN provide community-based education sessions on cancer prevention and early detection with the message that modifying risk factors may prevent cancer and that getting screened detects cancer earlier, when it can be treated more successfully. PCEN health educators located statewide conduct interactive evidence-based cancer education on colorectal, ovarian, prostate, and skin cancers. Mobilizing additional support, the PCEN grantees partner with other organizations to train volunteer health educators, targeting critical areas of burden. Uniform messages are presented through modules approved for PCEN, including presentations, anatomical models, risk assessment brochures, evaluation surveys, and pre- and post-tests that evaluate changes in participants' knowledge, intention to screen, and attitudes about cancer. Sessions are flexible, averaging about 20 minutes, and question-and-answer sessions are included for seminars and workshops. Culturally appropriate information and free participant education materials are provided.

Targeted populations include:

- Colorectal cancer: Men and women aged 50 years and older.
- Ovarian cancer: Women aged 25 years and older.
- Prostate cancer: Men aged 50 years and older, and African American and high-risk men aged 45 years or younger.
- Skin cancer: Men and women aged 18 years and older.

Success Impact

PCEN is increasing awareness and changing behaviors of residents through information about risk factors, symptoms, and the benefits of early detection through screening. Between April 1, 2008 and June 30, 2008, 10,084 participants attended PCEN educational sessions. Independent analysis conducted by Drexel University School of Public Health revealed statistically significant outcomes (P-value < 0.001):

- **Raising Awareness.** Attending a PCEN cancer education session significantly increases knowledge about signs and symptoms of cancer, risk factors for cancer, and screening tests for all four cancers.
- **Changing Attitudes.** Attending a PCEN education session significantly reduces misconceptions about screening being painful or embarrassing for all four cancers.
- **Promoting Early Detection.** Attending a PCEN education session significantly increases intention to be screened.
- **Equity in Impact.** Participants benefit from the education sessions, regardless of level of education.

Contact

Charlotte Greenawalt
Pennsylvania Department of Health
717-787-5251
✉ cgreenawal@state.pa.us
🌐 www.health.state.pa.us